Daniel Webster, New England, and the West
Author(s): Peter J. Parish
Reviewed work(s):
Source: *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Dec., 1967), pp. 524-549
Published by: Organization of American Historians
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2937405
Accessed: 06/03/2012 23:45

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at
http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Organization of American Historians is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of American History*.

http://www.jstor.org

Daniel Webster, New England, and the West

PETER J. PARISH

IN the sectional politics of the decades after the War of 1812, New England was obliged, however slowly and reluctantly, to come to terms with the growing West.[1] For the more conservative New England spokesmen, Federalists, National Republicans, and Whigs, the adjustment was painful and difficult—and for some indeed, intolerable. Eastern anxiety about the character and future growth of the West had been part of American history since colonial and Revolutionary days. Later it had found expression on numerous occasions from the Philadelphia Convention to the Hartford Convention. Fear and resentment of the West sprang from several different sources. The fluid, restless, leveling character of western society was seen as a threat to social order and stability. Emigration to the West threatened to drain away the labor force of the East, just as the competition of rich western lands seemed bound to impoverish New England's struggling farmers. But in politics at least, the basic fear was that New England's position in the Union would be undermined by the rise of this formidable new power in the West. New England seemed destined to become an impotent minority in a Union dominated by an alliance of western and southern agrarians. Some pessimists, indeed, concluded that the ties of Union must inevitably be cut by the sharp ridges of the Alleghenies, or at least that there would

Mr. Parish is lecturer in American history in the University of Glasgow.

[1] This article is part of a wider study of the New England attitude toward the West. The use of the terms "New England" and "the West" in this context inevitably obscures divisions and minimizes variations within the two regions. For the purposes of this study, the West may be generally taken to mean the Old Northwest—Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin—with some reference also to neighboring states like Kentucky, Missouri, and Iowa. As for New England, there is special emphasis on the dominant group of conservative National Republicans and Whigs, particularly in the lower tier of New England states, above all in Massachusetts. It is true of course that neither Boston nor Massachusetts can be taken as necessarily representative of New England, but the writer has chosen to refer generally to New England attitudes and New England interests, in much the same way as Daniel Webster and his contemporaries commonly did. Where a more precise definition is needed, it has been provided.

be no acceptable role for New England in any Union which was likely to survive.[2]

Forty years after the Hartford Convention, however, a new national party was to be born out of the union of Northeast and Northwest and was to grow most vigorously in New England and in that "greater New England" which had arisen in the West. The Republican party grew out of the battles over the extension of slavery, but the alliance of Northeast and Northwest represented a wider community, or at least congruity, of interest between the sections. As that alliance evolved, so too the New England attitude moved gradually toward a new relationship with the West. Beginning with an anxious watch on western growth, accompanied by unconvincing protestations of good will, this process passed by way of the grandiose plans of John Quincy Adams for the controlled development of the West in the 1820s, through the northeastern attempt to match southern bids for the hand of the West in the 1830s, to support for homestead and railroad land grants and improvements on the Great Lakes in the 1850s. The attempt to contain and restrain the West gave way very gradually, over many years, to a grudging recognition that the West must have its own way and that New England would serve its own interests best by assisting and supporting the West in the achievement of its ends. By the late 1840s and the 1850s, a new generation of political figures in New England, free soilers, conscience Whigs, and then Republicans, men such as Charles Sumner, Robert Rantoul, John P. Hale, Henry Wilson, and Charles Francis Adams, typified the revised attitude toward the West in their willingness, or even eagerness, to support western aims and satisfy western demands.

Ironically it was Daniel Webster, whom they now scorned and derided, who had blazed the pro-western trail which this new generation followed. Above all others, he had helped to drag his reluctant fellow Yankees into a mid-century acceptance of the West's new place in American life and into a first tentative adjustment to it. The casting of Webster in such a role may seem surprising at first sight. Behind the mask of heroic defender of the Constitution and the Union, he has come to be regarded as the archetype of the orthodox, eastern conservative, "the grand conservator of wealth against unfavorable legislation,"[3] and the spokesman—the paid mouthpiece indeed

[2] As late as 1824, Peter O. Thacher warned Webster that if the western states did not mend their ways, the ties of Union would be severed, "and we shall return to the old thirteen stars, under which our fathers fought their way to independence. We can live better without them than they can live without us." Thacher to Webster, May 5, 1824, Daniel Webster Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress). Except where otherwise stated, all references to the Webster Papers are to the collection in the Library of Congress.

[3] John Wentworth, *Congressional Reminiscences* (Chicago, 1882), 34-35.

—of the financial, the commercial, and later the manufacturing interests in New England and New York. His great qualities and massive abilities, it is often held, were betrayed by an insatiable but frustrated ambition for the presidency, by a degrading dependence on his paymasters, and by a moral failure on the issue of slavery. His conservatism, his aristocratic posture, and his devotion to property interests, put him further and further out of touch with the people in a burgeoning democratic society. This is a widely accepted verdict on Webster, but it may not be the whole truth.[4] Some qualification is needed, for example, of the judgment that "Webster was never known to lose touch with the opinions of his constituents or to act in opposition to the wishes of the majorities which elected him to public office."[5] Certainly in his attitude toward the West, he differed widely from his friends and supporters; and he was well aware of his unusual position. Perhaps his freedom of action was greater where their interests were not felt to be so directly or obviously involved. Perhaps, too, his own ambitions impelled him to adopt a broader view of New England interests and a more sympathetic response to western demands.

Webster's early career reveals him as an orthodox, conservative spokesman for his section on this as on other matters. Although he steered clear of the Hartford Convention, his record during the War of 1812, like the record of New England Federalists as a whole, was to prove a severe and lasting handicap to his political ambitions. It certainly provided his opponents with plenty of ammunition in the debate with Robert Y. Hayne in 1830.[6] Three years later, Elisha Whittlesey of Ohio reminded Webster of his own words after the defeat of Adams to the effect that "it would be many years before New England would give another President to the U. States," because of the prejudices of other sections.[7] In 1835, when Webster was very actively interested in the presidential contest of the next year, his closest supporters felt obliged to consider the publication of a "tract" explaining his wartime position to "the west—the war-loving & hot west . . . expanding for that location and meridian."[8] In 1838 a Yankee settler in

[4] For typically unsympathetic estimates of Webster, see Vernon Louis Parrington, *The Romantic Revolution in America, 1800-1860* (New York, 1927), 304-16, and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Age of Jackson* (Boston, 1945), 83-85. Claude Moore Fuess, *Daniel Webster* (2 vols., Boston, 1930), is sound but generally uncritical; Richard N. Current, *Daniel Webster and the Rise of National Conservatism* (Boston, 1955) is the best recent appraisal.

[5] Robert Lincoln Carey, *Daniel Webster as an Economist* (New York, 1929), 133.

[6] *The Works of Daniel Webster* (6 vols., Boston, 1851), III, 284, 308-15.

[7] Elisha Whittlesey to Webster, Sept. 14, 1833, Webster Papers.

[8] Rufus Choate to Edward Everett, Jan. 16, 1835, Everett Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society).

Michigan wrote that though westerners acknowledged Webster's ability, they doubted his availability. "The name of Federalist and Hartford Conventionist (it being almost impossible to eradicate from the public mind his immediate connection with the latter) are strong weapons in the hands of our opponents, which they wield with powerful effect." The writer had come from Massachusetts "highly prejudiced in favor of Mr. Webster," but soon found it "useless to brest [sic] public opinion on this point."[9]

Within a few years of 1815, however, Webster himself came to see that while the end of the war marked a great turning point in the history of both section and nation, it was not inevitably a turn for the worse. With increasing regularity and mounting enthusiasm, he described how the United States had directed its thoughts inward and had concentrated on developing the resources of the various regions of the country and on binding them together by better communications.[10] No region would benefit more, Webster insisted, than the growing West. "The East is old, pretty fully peopled, and small. The West is new, vast, and thinly peopled. Our rivers can be measured; yours cannot. We are bounded; you are boundless."[11] This note of exultation in the growth of the West became more and more frequent in the 1820s and 1830s, not only in speeches to western audiences but also in addresses to his fellow Whigs in the Northeast.[12]

But it was of course in 1830 that Webster most powerfully proclaimed himself as the friend, champion, and admirer of the West. The debate on Foot's resolution was essentially a sectional struggle for power, with the political allegiance of the West as the glittering prize. Webster was under no illusion about this, as his speeches show. Often with dubious support from the historical evidence, he sought to justify New England's record of friendship with the West from the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, drawn up by Nathan Dane,[13] down through the embarrassing episodes of the War of 1812 and on to the issues of the years after 1815—the public

[9] N. S. Howe to Caleb Cushing, Feb. 18, 1838, Cushing Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress).

[10] Speech at Faneuil Hall, Boston, June 5, 1828, *Works*, I, 167-69; second reply to Hayne, Jan. 26, 1830, *ibid.*, III, 295-98; speech at Bangor, Maine, Aug. 25, 1835, *ibid.*, I, 310-12.

[11] Speech at Pittsburgh, July 8, 1833, *ibid.*, I, 304.

[12] In an address to an audience of conservative New York City Whigs at Niblo's Saloon, March 15, 1837, Webster sang the praises of the Great Lakes and their place in the grand American design: "let me ask if such a MAP was ever before presented to the eye of any statesman, as the theatre for the exercise of his wisdom and patriotism?" *Ibid.*, I, 348.

[13] After the debate, the aged Nathan Dane sent Webster evidence to disprove the claim that Jefferson was the author of the Ordinance and insisted that the credit for "this powerful instrument in building the West" clearly belonged to the East and to Dane himself. Dane to Webster, March 29, 1830, Webster Papers.

lands, internal improvements, and the tariff.[14] Through most of his two speeches Webster's tone was defensive. When he did counterattack, his fire was aimed at Hayne and the South and not at the West. Although the most savage attacks on New England and on Webster in the debate came from Thomas Hart Benton rather than Hayne, Webster was not to be betrayed into giving gratuitous offense to the West. When he struck back, it was to claim that the South, not New England, wished to curb the growth of the West in order to stop the drain on its population; or it was to pounce on Hayne's ill-chosen question, "what interest has South Carolina in a canal in Ohio?" "Sir, we narrow-minded people of New England do not reason thus. Our *notion* of things is entirely different."[15] Above all, Webster chose as the field of his major counterattack, not the sectional issues of public lands and internal improvements which concerned the West, but the constitutional issues of the federal union and states' rights. Out of the whole of Webster's contribution to the debate, only the last quarter is devoted to this constitutional argument; but it is for this and for the climactic emotional salute to the Union that the speeches have been generally remembered. The debate with Hayne won Webster his reputation as champion of the Union, but inside the hero's shining armor lurked the persistent Yankee suitor for the hand of the West.

The rapturous reception accorded to Webster's speeches in New England reveals, significantly, the broad gap which separated his own liberal prowestern views from the less cordial western sympathies of many of his constituents. Much of the attention and the adulation were necessarily concentrated on Webster's defense of the Constitution and the Union.[16] But the other dominating theme in both public and private reactions to the debate was a profound satisfaction that a New Englander had at last answered the accusations of arrogant westerners and southerners and had repaid their insults with interest. In heaping praise upon their champion's efforts, Webster's warmest admirers went a long way toward undermining his claim that New England was the West's best friend. After publishing the second reply to Hayne in full, the *Columbian Centinel* urged its subscribers to read the speech. "As an answer to a premeditated and gratuitous assault by Messrs. BENTON & HAYNE on this section of the country—it is a most efficient and triumphant vindication of New England." Earlier the same

[14] First and second speeches on Foot's Resolution, Jan. 20, 26-27, 1830, *Works*, III, 248-342. See especially 250-52, 260-69, 277-78, 282-315.

[15] *Ibid.*, III, 288-90.

[16] See for example [Edward Everett], "The Debate in the Senate of the United States," *North American Review*, XXXI (Oct. 1830), 462-546.

paper had reported a resolution passed by the Massachusetts National Republican convention in Boston to much the same effect. The *New England Palladium* thought that Webster had triumphantly smashed a projected bargain over the public lands and the tariff between South and West, and it saw Benton as the villain of the piece. "Mr. Benton of the Western Country, it is said, has an unwarranted (any is unwarranted) prejudice against the Eastern region. We wonder he welcomes the diurnal visits of the Sun, considering that it rises in the East." The Boston *Courier*, too, condemned the alleged conspiracy against the East, launched a vigorous counterattack against both West and South, and reserved its most withering fire for Benton. It ridiculed his argument that New England manufacturers aimed to dam the tide of emigration to the West, mocked his views on internal improvements, and dismissed as one of "Col. Benton's clap-traps," and "hobby-horses," his policy on the public lands. Above all, the paper's Washington correspondent lauded the boldness of Webster's reply to his attackers and contrasted it with the "supineness" of New England's other representatives over the years. For too long, New England had been subjected to the "overflowings of bile of such men as Hayne, Benton and Tazewell" and to the abuse of southern and western "demagogues" whose purpose was "to decry and defame New England, and break down her leading men. They envy her wealth, her success, her institutions and her freedom, and from this envy proceeds a settled and malignant hatred."[17]

The letters which Webster received after the great debate show the same combination of approval of his constitutional arguments, delight at his defense of the good name of New England, and animosity, open or veiled, toward the West and South. One correspondent from Wheeling urged him to visit the West where he had many friends, "No Bentons among them."[18] Much more typical is the letter presenting resolutions passed by a meeting at Greenfield, Massachusetts, on March 31, 1830: "Resolved that the late able vindication of the character and policy of New England, made by Hon. Daniel Webster, in the Senate of the United States, against the unfounded and unprovoked attacks of Senators from the South and West, deserves the cordial approbation of every enlightened freeman, who loves his country and its constitution."[19] But whatever their own attitudes toward the West may have been, Webster's supporters were nonetheless convinced of

[17] Boston *Columbian Centinel*, March 6, Feb. 24, 1830; Boston *New England Palladium*, Jan. 26, Feb. 5, 19, 1830; Boston *Courier* (semiweekly ed.), Jan. 28, Feb. 4, 11, 1830.

[18] S. Atkinson to Webster, March 5, 1830, Webster Papers.

[19] John Severs to Webster, April [?], 1830, *ibid.*

the need to circulate his speeches widely and especially "to send his speech through all the Western States."[20]

For many supporters, then, Webster's replies to Hayne may have been a defensive reaction against the West rather than a proclamation of friendship for it; but Webster himself never retreated from his pro-western position. During the thirties his presidential aspirations reached their peak, and his trips to the West in 1833 and 1837 were clearly and avowedly inspired by political motives. In 1831 he received several letters, particularly from Ohio, urging him to visit the West;[21] and in 1832 a Nashville correspondent warned him that it would be "a reproach to an American statesman of eminence" not to have seen "this new, advancing, and important section of our country."[22] His first visit in 1833 did not take him farther than Ohio; but he was very well received, not least by Jacksonians in this period of the brief Jackson-Webster flirtation after the nullification crisis.[23] He soon felt the need to improve on his first acquaintance. "I ought this spring to go to the West, as far at least as Ken[tucky] & Indiana," he wrote in 1835. "I am fully persuaded it would be a highly useful thing. My friends urge it upon me incessantly."[24] This was the period of Webster's major bid for the presidency; however, he did not make another tour until 1837, the year after the election. This much longer trip took him as far as St. Louis and included stops in Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan. He was overwhelmed with invitations, warmly welcomed everywhere, and extravagantly praised as a friend of the West and as a champion of the Union. Webster himself thought the tour was a great success.[25] His speeches were full of admiration and excitement at the growth of the West, and they suggest that what he saw there made a profound impression upon him.[26] He

[20] Abbott Lawrence to Everett, April 13, 1830, Everett Papers. Lawrence, Robert G. Shaw, Thomas H. Perkins, and other wealthy backers of Webster were active in this matter. See Lawrence to Everett, March 31, April 5, 26, 1830, *ibid.*; Perkins to Nathan Hale, Feb. 27, 1830, Hale Family Papers (Manuscript Division, Library of Congress). Henry Clay, too, thought Webster's speeches were "above all praise" and urged that they be "extensively circulated." Clay to Everett, April 10, 1830, Everett Papers.

[21] Timothy Walker to Webster, March 1, 1831; John Woods to Webster, March 8, 1831; Whittlesey to Webster, June 23, 1831, Webster Papers.

[22] Thomas Washington to Webster, June 27, 1832, *ibid*

[23] George Ticknor Curtis, *Life of Daniel Webster* (2 vols., New York, 1870), I, 462-64, 562-64; Fuess, *Webster*, II, 18-19, 62-65; and William A. Wood, "Daniel Webster's Visit to Missouri—his Last Western Trip," *Magazine of American History, with Notes and Queries*, XIX (1888), 513-16.

[24] Webster to Jeremiah Mason, Feb. 6, 1835, Webster Papers.

[25] Webster to Cushing, July 29, 1837, Cushing Papers.

[26] Speech at Madison, Indiana, June 1, 1837, *Works*, I, 401-09. In a speech at St. Louis, he marveled to find himself standing on the west bank of the Mississippi, and he exulted in the fantastic growth of Missouri, "a Hercules in the cradle." St. Louis *Bulletin*, June 15, 1837, quoted in Boston *Columbian Centinel*, July 1, 1837.

never visited the West again, although he received invitations in 1847 and even planned a tour in 1852 if he won the presidential nomination.[27]

His western interests in the 1830s did leave him with an unwanted legacy in the shape of a number of large and unprofitable investments. The purchase, in 1836-1837, of large tracts of land in Illinois and other northwestern states may have been a mark of his faith and confidence in the West; yet the speculation was ill-timed, for the panic of 1837 destroyed most of the value of the lands. The whole venture proved very costly to Webster, his friends, and his creditors; but it is hard to detect any deleterious influence on his political views, which his ill-starred land speculations may have had.[28]

All Webster's efforts failed to bring him close to the presidential prize in the 1830s. Despite his own disappointments, he campaigned vigorously for William H. Harrison in 1840, did his best to adapt his oratorical style to the mood of that extraordinary contest, and, in his speech at Saratoga, put himself firmly in the log-cabin tradition.[29] The Whigs' campaign of 1840 is the prime example of their attempt to appeal to the West electorally without satisfying its demands on matters of substance. Before 1840 Webster had already moved beyond this position on a number of specific issues; afterward, his attention was concentrated for a time on foreign policy and on the problems of expansion. In relation to these, his posture was not calculated to win many western admirers. But it was not long until he was again attempting, as energetically as ever, to accommodate the interests of his own section and those of the West.

Throughout his career, indeed, Webster's attitude was most clearly revealed by his record on specific issues: the tariff, as he sought to persuade the West that it had a stake in a measure close to the hearts and pockets of his New England supporters; internal improvements, concerning which a harmony of interests between his own section and the West might be most easily established; and, of fundamental concern to the new states, public lands, on which the New England attitude was generally unsympathetic to western demands.[30] In each case Webster developed views that differed

[27] Fuess, *Webster*, II, 289.

[28] *Ibid.*, 59, 62, 73, 78, 341-43; Fuess, *The Life of Caleb Cushing* (2 vols., New York, 1923), I, 230-34, II, 85-88; Curtis, *Webster*, I, 571-72; Clyde A. Duniway, "Daniel Webster and the West," *Minnesota History*, IX (March 1928), 10-11. It is hard to take seriously Fuess' suggestion that it was Webster's unfortunate experience with western lands that made him unsympathetic toward expansionism and blind to the possibility of developments beyond existing frontiers. Fuess, *Webster*, II, 141, 151, 171. A more intriguing possibility might be that his misfortunes as a land speculator strengthened his pro-settler sympathies in public-land policy.

[29] Robert Gray Gunderson, *The Log-Cabin Campaign* (Lexington, 1957), 173-82.

[30] These issues have been singled out because sectional attitudes and alignments on them are meaningful and because the issues remained important from 1815 to 1850.

considerably from those of his New England Whig colleagues and sponsors; his sympathy with western aims and interests was consistently stronger than theirs.

In the tariff debates of 1824 and 1828, Webster found himself on the defensive, first in explaining his adherence to free trade and then in justifying his rapid conversion to protection. His arguments against, and then for, protection were based almost entirely on the changing economic structure and interests of New England itself. There was little or no attempt to appeal to other sections of the country; indeed, not without some reason, he depicted New England as the victim of a southern and western conspiracy.[31] He disparaged the home-market argument, put forward by the supporters of the 1824 bill, and he complained that the duties on wool and woolens in the 1828 bill would aid the woolgrowers, including those of the West, but not the woolen manufacturers.[32] In his only direct reference to the West during the 1824 debate, he argued that even if those eastern areas where the cotton industry was established derived some advantage from the tariff, this was more than counterbalanced by the natural advantages of other regions.

> I cannot but regard the situation of the West as highly favorable to human happiness. It offers, in the abundance of its new and fertile lands, such assurances of permanent property and respectability to the industrious, it enables them to lay such sure foundations for a competent provision for their families, it makes such a nation of freeholders, that it need not envy the happiest and most prosperous of the manufacturing communities. We may talk as we will of well-clothed day-laborers or journeymen; they are not, after all, to be compared, either for happiness or respectability, with him who sleeps under his own roof and cultivates his own fee-simple inheritance.[33]

This was not so much an overture to the West as a claim for compensation from it.

During the 1830s Webster was the consistent champion of the protective tariff, but opposition to nullification tended to overshadow any direct or sustained appeal to western interests. At the time of the passage of the tariff of 1842, he was secretary of state and, though very active behind the scenes, was not publicly involved in the debates. In 1843, however, immediately after his resignation from the cabinet, he came out in favor of reciprocity, the negotiation of trade treaties with Britain and other countries,

[31] Speech on the tariff bill, May 9, 1828, *Works*, III, 234-40.

[32] Speech on the tariff bill, April 1-2, 1824, *ibid.*, 106; speech on the tariff bill, May 9, 1828, *ibid.*, 240-43.

[33] Speech on the tariff bill, April 1-2, 1824, *ibid.*, 136. This passage also suggests that Webster was an early subscriber to the "agrarian myth."

which would have put the foreign economic relations of the United States on a settled basis and removed the tariff from the political arena. He had been toying with the idea for some time and had received advice on the subject from friends on both sides of the Atlantic.[34] Outlining his proposals in a speech at Baltimore on May 18, 1843, he stressed the interdependence of American commerce, agriculture, and manufactures, as well as the need to put protection on a permanent foundation. In particular, he saw good prospects of increased exports of American agricultural products (tobacco, rice, and especially corn) to Britain despite sales resistance to the last commodity. As a "quid pro quo" for this, he was prepared for some "modification" of the American tariff.[35] Here surely was a clear bid for the friendship of the West, as indeed of the South as well, which would at the same time preserve basic New England interests. Webster, moreover, was not acting alone. Before his Baltimore speech, he had exchanged letters with a group of leading Boston merchants, bankers, and manufacturers, who urged him, on resigning office, to devote himself to the question of international trade and reciprocity. In his reply Webster argued that "the grain and corn producing States" would always find their best market in "the manufacturing and commercial population of the East," yet they would also have a surplus which would need a foreign outlet. Reciprocity might be the answer.[36]

David Sears, a signatory of the letter to Webster, was more explicit, although he denied any intention of abandoning protection.

> You are well aware—and the information comes from a quarter to leave the fact hardly doubtful—that in all probability the industry of the North is approaching a point at which it must successfully resist its opponents, or yield to their power. The great interests of the South, in cotton, rice, and tobacco, are striving to unite with them the wheat and grazing interests for a purpose which, if successful, may be extremely prejudicial to the North, and whose combined action will be seen and felt at the coming session of Congress.

[34] Joseph Hume to Webster, March 22, 1841; H. Birckhead to Webster, Jan. 17, 1842; William B. Parker to Webster, March 4, April 1, Dec. 3, 1842; T. Chambers to Webster, April 24, 1843, Webster Papers. There had been strong rumors in the press that Webster was staying on in John Tyler's cabinet in order to negotiate a commercial treaty with Britain or that when he did resign he would head a special mission to London for this purpose. See *Niles' National Register*, LXIV (May 6, 1843), 150, and (May 13, 1843), 163.

[35] *Niles' National Register*, LXIV (June 3, 1843), 219-22. This speech is not included in Webster's published *Works*.

[36] Sears and others to Webster, April 28, 1843; Webster to Sears and others, May 3, 1843, published in Boston *Courier* (daily), May 24, 1843, two days after the paper had printed Webster's Baltimore speech. The signatories of the first letter constitute a roster of Boston's business leaders. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent citations to the Boston *Courier* are to the daily edition.

The present tariff was very precarious, and Webster, Sears believed, should represent the United States on an international commission to put trade on a sounder footing.[37]

Webster's Baltimore speech, and the reciprocity proposal as a whole, aroused mixed feelings in the Whig press of Boston. The *Courier* took a favorable view and shared the fear that a coalition of West and South would otherwise strip New England industry of its protection. The *Advertiser*, however, scorned the whole idea as impractical, unconstitutional, and inimical to New England interests. "The basis of the proposed system of arrangement appears to be the barter of the protection heretofore afforded to American manufactures, in exchange for encouragement to American agriculture." The *Atlas*, too, saw little or no merit in the scheme and adhered to orthodox protectionist views.[38] Other reactions to Webster's adoption of reciprocity laid emphasis on his perennial political ambitions and discerned a plot to discredit Henry Clay and to appease John C. Calhoun and the South. John Davis, for many years Webster's colleague in the Senate, expressed surprise that Webster should so suddenly embrace a major new policy. "He is not a man devoid of ambition, or one who acts without motives." The whole affair, Davis thought, had "its foundations in president-making"; and Abbott Lawrence took the same view.[39]

Whether its aim was president-making or treaty-making, the reciprocity scheme came to nothing, and Webster reemerged only a few months later in a speech at Rochester as an exponent of orthodox protectionism. Quite unabashed at having so recently courted the West with talk of exporting its surpluses to Europe, he now extolled the virtues of a large, steady, home market and argued that protection was not really for the benefit of manufactures but of agriculture.[40] The argument was different, but the object was the same.

Back in the Senate and well primed by his supporters, Webster took the lead in the unavailing fight against the lower duties of the tariff of 1846.

[37] Sears to Shaw, May 27, 1843, published in *Mercantile Journal*, June 5, 1843, quoted in Boston *Courier*, June 6, 1843.

[38] Boston *Courier*, May 24, 26, 27, June 7, 8, 10, 1843; Boston *Daily Advertiser*, June 7, 27, 29, July 6, 7, 1843; Boston *Atlas*, quoted in *Niles' National Register*, LXIV (June 10, 1843), 234.

[39] John Davis to Nathan Hale, June 11, July 4, 1843, Hale Family Papers; Davis to John P. Bigelow, July [?], 1843, Davis-Bigelow Letters (Harvard University); Lawrence to Nathan Appleton, Aug. 16, 1843, Appleton-Lawrence Letters (Harvard University). See also *Niles' National Register*, LXIV (June 10, 17, 1843), 236, 252, for extracts from the New York *Evening Post* and the Frankfort (Ky.) *Commonwealth*, which interpret the scheme as a move against Clay. There is no doubt that the reciprocity proposal was partly, or even primarily, a political maneuver; but the whole episode seems to have been very much neglected by Webster's biographers.

[40] Speech at Rochester, Sept. 21, 1843, Boston *Daily Advertiser*, Sept. 27, 28, 1843.

He opposed the bill on a variety of grounds and at times gave expression to the same New England persecution complex as in the tariff debates of the twenties. But, while most of his friends and correspondents concentrated on local New England interests, he went out of his way to stress the baneful effects which the measure would also have on a variety of western interests, manufacturing as well as agricultural: the producers of hemp, the lead mines of Missouri and Illinois, the woolgrowers of Ohio and western New York. "When will the Western farmers sell as much wheat annually to England, as shall equal their loss, by this bill, in the article of wool alone?"[41] He warned the grain-growing states of the Northwest that the repeal of the British corn laws would not greatly benefit them and advised them that their true prosperity was to be found in satisfying the home market. If they diminished the protection of manufactures, they would be diminishing their own market. At the conclusion of his speech, Webster returned to the same theme in answer to some remarks by his old adversary, George McDuffie of South Carolina, and again renewed the attempt to outbid the South for the hand of the West.[42]

In the 1840s, then, whether advocating reciprocity or defending the protective tariff, Webster had one eye very much on the West. His attitude had moved slowly, but very considerably, from his more parochial outlook of the 1820s; and the emphasis of his arguments had correspondingly shifted. The change reflected the development of both Webster and the West in the intervening years.

On internal improvements, Webster's record is one of much greater constancy and consistency both in support of the general principle and in cultivation of the West. Here was the issue which led the way to his conversion from sectionalist to nationalist. Here too, his position differed somewhat from that of his New England colleagues, though the difference was normally only one of degree, or of time.

As early as 1817, Webster was one of only five New England representatives, out of thirty-nine, to vote for the "bonus bill" for financing internal improvements.[43] In 1824 he voted in favor of the bill for surveys of roads and canals; Massachusetts supported the bill in the House by a margin of eight to five, but New England as a whole voted against it, twenty-six to twelve.[44] In 1825 Webster emerged as a leading spokesman for internal improvements, and for the West, in the debate on the bill to extend

[41] Speech on the tariff, July 25, 27, 1846, *Works*, V, 189-91, 197-98, 198-99.
[42] *Ibid.*, 231-33, 242-43.
[43] *Annals of Congress*, 14 Cong., 2 Sess., 934 (Feb 8, 1817).
[44] *Ibid.*, 18 Cong., 1 Sess., 1468-69 (Feb. 10, 1824). In the Senate, New England cast only one vote for the bill and nine against. *Ibid.*, 570-71 (April 24, 1824).

the Cumberland Road. In a sharp exchange with Webster, McDuffie, completely abandoning his position of only a year earlier, condemned the proposed improvement as a purely local, sectional matter. He later complained that the public lands were already settling too fast and were draining away the population of the Atlantic seaboard without any further stimulus in the form of improved communications.[45] For his part, Webster favored the expenditure of more money beyond the mountains, expressed shock at McDuffie's views on the public lands, and took a generous view both of the western pioneer and of the "loss of relative importance" which the older regions would suffer as population moved west.[46]

Here, as so often elsewhere, presidential politics lay behind the debates; the real prize was not the extension of the Cumberland Road but the election of John Quincy Adams. The debate took place on January 18, 1825; John Quincy Adams was elected by the House on February 9.[47] Webster's performance won him some recognition in the West. Joseph Vance, a representative from Ohio, assured him that he had earned gratitude and esteem there for "the interest you took during the last Congress in favour of some of the important measures of the West."[48] Another Ohio correspondent thought that this was a very important time for New England. Better communications with the West

would forever secure to you the friendship and political influence of almost all the Western World. A majority of the people of the free Western States were the children of New England, and only give them a road to the old mansion, by which they will consider themselves neighbours, and they will soon *feel themselves children.* The line of conduct of Messrs. WEBSTER, CROWNINSHIELD, etc. in the Cumberland Road question, and others which have come up this and the

[45] *Register of Debates in Congress*, 18 Cong., 2 Sess., 246-48, 254 (Jan. 18, 1825).

[46] *Ibid.*, 250-51, 254-55. With heavy sarcasm Webster surmised "why some of our States continue to have such bad roads; it must be for the purpose of preventing people from going out of them.'

[47] This at least was the explanation which William Plumer recorded in his journal at the time and recalled after Webster's death. Webster's remarks on the bill "were peculiarly gratifying to the Western Members; & were not without their effect in bringing them to vote for Adams." Webster's support was vital to the bill's passage, wrote Plumer. It was a bold gamble, "yet fortunate, as it exhibited so many of Adams' friends in favor of this western measure, & most of the Atlantic friends of Jackson against it." Jackson's friends, Plumer argued, hoped that the defeat of the bill would irritate the northwestern states and make them demand a western President. But the debate and the vote had the opposite effect. Plumer to George Ticknor, April 2, 1853, *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, National Edition (18 vols., Boston, 1903), XVII, Appendix, 556. This explanation seems plausible enough, since it may account for McDuffie's volte-face on internal improvements; but it makes little sense of the harshness of the anti-western views which he expressed in the debate of Jan. 18, 1825.

[48] Curtis, *Webster*, I, 241-42.

last session, have had a great effect in attaching the people of this country to New England and the East.[49]

The letter ends with an endorsement of Adams for President.

Support for internal improvements and understanding of western interests in the subject were consistent themes in Webster's speeches for many years afterward. In an important address in Faneuil Hall, June 5, 1828, he defended internal improvements on grounds of constitutional principle, consolidation of the Union, justice to the West, and enlightened Yankee self-interest.[50] Long passages of his replies to Hayne in 1830 deal with the same subject and with the defense of New England's record on internal improvements. Indeed, Webster quoted at great length from the debate with McDuffie in 1825 to make his point.[51] In 1836, supporting aid to the Louisville and Portland Canal, he said: "I look to the magnitude of the object, and not to its locality. I ask not whether it be east or west of the mountains. There are no Alleghenies in my politics." He had often sought and received help from western members, and now he was happy to assist them. "I am as Western a man, on this bill, as he among them who is most Western."[52] A week later, he praised "that great agent of beneficence, prosperity, wealth, and power—INTERNAL IMPROVEMENT," as a prime cause of the rapid settlement of the West.

> This has brought the West to the Atlantic, and carried the Atlantic to the West. Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin are no longer places remote from us. Railroads and canals have brought the settlers of these regions so near to us that we almost fancy that we can see the smoke of their cabins and hear the strokes of their axes. From Maine to the upper Mississippi is already a beaten track, with one's acquaintances everywhere along the road, and that road even not a long one, if we measure it by the time required to pass over it.[53]

Through the thirties too, Webster supported extensions of the Cumberland Road, and his help was even sought, from Ohio, in persuading Congress to change the route of the road for the benefit of particular localities.[54]

[49] Boston *Columbian Centinel*, Feb. 19, 1825

[50] *Works*, I, 167-70

[51] *Ibid.*, III, 266-69. Webster himself later explained how a friend reminded him of the earlier debate and how he had gone back to it to find ammunition for his reply to Hayne. Webster to Warren Dutton, March 8, 1830, Webster Papers (Dartmouth College).

[52] Speech on the Louisville and Portland Canal, May 25, 1836, *Works*, IV, 250, 251.

[53] Speech on the distribution of the surplus revenue, May 31, 1836, *ibid.*, 262. For other examples of Webster's support for internal improvements in the West in this period, see *ibid.*, I, 304-05, 347-48, 404-05.

[54] Stephen Fales to Webster, Dec. 29, 1834, Webster Papers. For Webster's further support of the Cumberland Road, see *Cong. Globe*, 26 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 367-68 (April 1, 1840).

Webster's interest in western improvements continued undiminished in his later years. In 1846 he was persuaded by John Wentworth of Illinois to intervene in the debate on the rivers and harbors bill on behalf of an appropriation for a harbor on Lake Michigan between Chicago and Milwaukee. First, he challenged "the doctrine that, when God created the world, or even Lake Michigan, He left nothing for man to do"; and then he enthusiastically described the growth of the West and its trade. "He started a steamer from Chicago, laden to the guards with freight and passengers," recalled an observer. "He then described a storm in a manner that no man but Webster could describe." The boat was sunk, its passengers lost, all to satisfy the opponents of the bill and their narrow construction of the Constitution. Benton allegedly said this was "the greatest speech upon so small a matter that I ever heard." The bill passed the Senate, but James K. Polk vetoed it; northwestern indignation at this veto led to the Rivers and Harbors Convention at Chicago in 1847.[55]

That convention was the great symbol of the coming together of Northeast and Northwest on the question of internal improvements. New Englanders, especially the Massachusetts delegation, played a conspicuous part in its sessions and exploited it for their own political advantage.[56] Webster was cordially invited to attend the convention in a letter containing the most fulsome flattery of "New England's most gifted son." "In you, sir, the Great West has ever found a faithful friend . . . the interests of the young, free West have ever been the object of your constant care." His voice and his help were needed at the convention. "The West is not ungrateful, and will surely remember any sacrifices made in her behalf."[57] Webster declined the invitation; but he was at great pains in his reply to show that internal improvements were essentially a Whig policy and had long been opposed by the Democrats, who, he feared, were now trying to steal the Whigs' thunder.[58] Webster's absence caused great disappointment, but he kept in touch with the proceedings; and it was he who, on June 19, 1848, presented to the Senate a memorial drawn up by the executive committee of the convention.[59] This convention was a recognition of the

[55] Wentworth, *Congressional Reminiscences*, 37-38. For an excellent account of the convention, see Mentor L. Williams, "The Chicago River and Harbor Convention, 1847," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XXXV (March 1949), 607-26.

[56] Williams, "Chicago Convention," 612, 613, 618-19, 623-26; Harry E. Pratt, ed., *Illinois as Lincoln Knew It: A Boston Reporter's Record of a Trip in 1847* (Springfield, Ill., 1938), 119, 124-25.

[57] N. B. Judd and others to Webster, May 12, 1847, Webster Papers.

[58] Webster to Judd and others, June 26, 1847, *Writings and Speeches*, XVI, 476-85. For Webster's party anxieties, see Webster to James A. Hamilton, June 17, July 1, 1847, *ibid.*, 475-76.

[59] *Cong. Globe*, 30 Cong., 1 Sess., 853 (June 19, 1848).

spectacular growth of Chicago; it was, incidentally, a recognition of Webster's record as a spokesman for the West.

In 1850 Congress passed the first of the great railroad land grants, the newest form of federal aid to internal improvements. Again Webster played a crucial role by helping to win the support of eastern votes and eastern capital for this Illinois Central project. His close friend, George Ashmun, was instrumental in piloting the bill through the House of Representatives.[60] Later, in writing to David A. Neal, president of the Illinois Central, Webster emphasized the great importance of the land grant and the future prospects of the railroad.[61]

Webster still nursed presidential illusions in 1852; and his supporters, planning a demonstration on his behalf during the Baltimore convention, sought to underscore his record of "steadfast support of judicious internal improvements in the South West and North West."[62] The presidential bid again failed, but the record stood. Through the 1850s, New England's senators and representatives, many of them men of a new generation like Sumner, Wilson, Hale, and Rantoul, gave increasing support to railroad land grants and other measures in the interest of the West. For a quarter century, Webster had led New England in this direction and had won for himself some recognition in the West, if not in the form he most coveted. He won less recognition by those from his own section who came after him, although they not only adopted his general principles on internal improvements but also copied his specific arguments without acknowledging them. Sumner defended railroad land grants in 1852 as a means of compensating the western states for the exemption from state taxation of all the public lands within their boundaries. Sumner and his friends boasted of the novelty and originality of his argument.[63] In fact, Webster had first used it in a speech in Faneuil Hall in 1828. Again, in 1840, he had declared that the federal government, as the "great untaxed proprietor" of these lands, should open up the country by building roads through it. It was only just and reasonable that the government should share the burden with the set-

[60] Wentworth, *Congressional Reminiscences*, 39-42. Wentworth's story of a deal involving eastern support for the Illinois Central grant in return for western support of the tariff has little evidence to sustain it. But there is no doubt that Webster and Ashmun materially assisted the passage of the bill. Paul W. Gates, *The Illinois Central Railroad and its Colonization Work* (Cambridge, 1934), 34-36; William K. Ackerman, *Historical Sketch of the Illinois Central Railroad* (Chicago, 1890), 7, 16.

[61] Webster to David A. Neal, March 12, 1852, *Writings and Speeches*, XVI, 647-48.

[62] J. D. Weston to Choate, June 8, 1852, Webster Papers.

[63] *Cong. Globe*, 32 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 134-36 (Jan. 27, 1852); Edward L. Pierce, *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner* (4 vols., Boston, 1877-1893), III, 272; John Weiss, *Life and Correspondence of Theodore Parker* (2 vols., New York, 1864), II, 212-13.

tlers on the public lands in this way.[64] Sumner neither realized nor acknowledged his debt to Webster; but both men were deploying their arguments for much the same end: to bid for western support and approval by a demonstration of New England's willingness to satisfy western demands. Such a concern was much less common in 1828, or even in 1840, than in 1852.

It is, however, on the question of the public lands that Webster's pro-western attitude stands out most strikingly. Here he did not merely differ in degree from orthodox eastern views of the subject; his position was for many years diametrically opposed to that of the great majority of his fellow New Englanders and Whigs. No issue was more important to westerners; no issue ranged the bulk of eastern conservative opinion so implacably against them. This school of thought held that the public lands were the common property of all the states; that they represented a great national treasure from which the federal government might derive a steady revenue for generations to come; that their settlement should be a deliberate, planned, orderly process, in which the rights of the settler were recognized but circumscribed; that cheap lands and rapid settlement would drain away eastern population, raise eastern labor costs, depreciate eastern land values, debauch public and private morality, and threaten the social order.

Webster shared some of these views and paid lip service to others. In the thirties and forties, he supported the official Whig policy of distribution of the proceeds of the public lands among all the states, and he opposed cession of the lands to the states in which they lay. But he was able to reconcile these views with a strongly pro-settler outlook, support for cheap or even free lands, and a firm belief that settlement, rather than revenue, was the main consideration in public-land policy. He had already made his position clear before he became a contender for the presidency in his debates with McDuffie in 1825 and Hayne in 1830. He did not think that "the National domain was to be regarded as any great source of revenue. The great object of the Government, in respect of these lands, was not so much the money derived from their sale, as it was the getting of them settled. . . . he did not think they ought to hug that domain as a great treasure which was to enrich the exchequer."[65] He denied any inconsistency between his support of cheap lands for settlers and his belief that the lands were a common fund to be used for the common benefit.[66]

The Senator expounded his view of land policy in his Niblo's Saloon

[64] Speech at Faneuil Hall, June 5, 1828, *Works*, I, 169; *Cong. Globe*, 26 Cong., 1 Sess., Appendix, 367-68 (April 1, 1840).

[65] *Register of Debates in Congress*, 18 Cong., 2 Sess., 252 (Jan. 18, 1825).

[66] *Works*, III, 288.

speech of 1837 in New York. Having denounced cession of the lands to the states and having urged a liberal policy, he said:

> The benefit derived from the public lands, after all, is, and must be, in the greatest degree, enjoyed by those who buy them and settle upon them. The original price paid to the government constitutes but a small part of their actual value. Their immediate rise in value, in the hands of the settler, gives him competence. . . . These are the advantages of Western emigrants and Western settlers; and they are such, certainly, as no country on earth ever before afforded to her citizens. This opportunity of purchase and settlement, this certainty of enhanced value, these sure means of immediate competence and ultimate wealth, —all these are the rights and the blessings of the people of the West, and they have my hearty wishes for their full and perfect enjoyment.
>
> I desire to see the public lands cultivated and occupied. I desire the growth and prosperity of the West, and the fullest development of its vast and extraordinary resources. I wish to bring it near to us, by every species of useful communication. I see, not without admiration and amazement, but yet without envy or jealousy, States of recent origin already containing more people than Massachusetts. These people I know to be part of ourselves; they have proceeded from the midst of us, and we may trust that they are not likely to separate themselves, in interest or in feeling, from their kindred, whom they have left on the farms and around the hearths of their common fathers.
>
> A liberal policy, a sympathy with its interests, an enlightened and generous feeling of participation in its prosperity, are due to the West, and will be met, I doubt not, by a return of sentiments equally cordial and equally patriotic.[67]

The ulterior motives might have been obvious, but the sentiments still genuine. Webster's liberal land policy manifested itself, moreover, in hard support of specific measures as well as in flights of oratory. This was especially true in that crucial period of the late 1830s when land policy was constantly under discussion in Congress and when Webster still viewed his own political prospects with optimism. He claimed to have given support a decade earlier to graduation of land prices and cheaper land for actual settlers, though that support was more apparent than real.[68] However, it was in the years 1837 to 1840 that he came out most strongly for preemption, for graduation, and even for donations of land to actual settlers. In a congressional speech of 1837 he said that, in preference to preemption, he

[67] Speech of March 15, 1837, *ibid.*, I, 352.

[68] *Register of Debates in Congress*, 20 Cong., 1 Sess., part 1, pp. 660, 666-67, 674 (April 15, 17, 21, 1828). Webster was speaking on Benton's graduation bill, but his performance suggests some kind of political maneuver. He proposed an amendment to limit the extent of graduation and to grant land to genuine settlers at a much reduced price. The amendment, though defeated 27-18, was supported by eight New England senators, apart from Webster, mainly men who showed no general disposition toward a liberal land policy. It seems likely that the aim was to obstruct the graduation bill by proposing amendments unacceptable to the bill's backers and yet devoid of obvious hostility to the West. For the vote see *Senate Journal*, 20 Cong., 1 Sess., 319-20 (April 21, 1828).

would favor a provision that "whosoever shall take the character of a settler of any surveyed lands of the United States should be entitled to a donation of eighty acres of land."[69] The next year he spoke in favor of a preemption bill by arguing that though he still preferred donations, this measure was necessary to do justice to the settlers and to preserve law and order on the frontier. He defended the "hardy, adventurous, and enterprising" frontiersmen against unmerited "expressions of contumely and reproach."[70] In 1839 he again expressed his preference for free land to actual settlers, as he gave his support to the graduation bill. Graduation, he argued, was only common sense; he reiterated his long-standing belief that "sale and settlement were the great objects in view . . . [and] our trust is to sell and settle—not to hold permanently."[71]

This consistent and outspoken defense of western interests is all the more remarkable because it set Webster apart from almost all his New England Whig colleagues. Two days before his 1837 speech favoring donations, his colleague in the Senate from Massachusetts, Davis, had delivered a long speech which might stand as a classic statement of the orthodox eastern viewpoint. Davis denounced presumptuous western claims to the lands, attacked preemption and preemptioners themselves, reaffirmed the revenue concept, and even suggested that if the government were concerned about surplus revenue, land sales might be limited or stopped for a time.[72] Webster's intervention on behalf of the preemption bill of 1838 not only shocked and dismayed Clay, ever a staunch opponent of preemption, but it also brought him into renewed conflict with Davis. Webster made a point-by-point reply to the criticisms of Clay and Davis, even though he expressed regret at disagreeing with his Massachusetts colleague.[73] Whig newspapers of Boston felt some embarrassment in reporting the debate. The *Atlas* had denounced the bill as a bounty to trespassers, violators of the law, and fraudulent speculators just before it received news of Webster's speech; it was now constrained to explain away the Senator's views as best it could, with the aid of a little distortion. The *Courier* handled a similar problem in a similar manner. After some vigorous abuse of the West and its insatiable demands, the editor copied from another paper, saying Webster had held his present views for some time, and then excused his behavior while praising Clay and Davis. The *Colum-*

[69] *Cong. Globe*, 24 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix, 157 (Feb. 11, 1837).
[70] Speech on preemption, Jan. 29, 1838, *Works*, IV, 392-99.
[71] Speech on graduation, Jan. 14, 1839, *ibid.*, 523-27.
[72] *Cong. Globe*, 24 Cong., 2 Sess., Appendix, 313-17 (Feb. 9, 1837).
[73] *Works*, IV, 395-401.

bian Centinel was more noncommittal but could not altogether conceal its distaste for the preemption bill.[74]

Davis was only one among many of Webster's fellow Yankees and Whigs who stood sternly by the old view of the public lands in these years and vigorously opposed the preemption and graduation bills. Levi Lincoln led the opposition to preemption in the House in 1838, and again in 1840.[75] Lawrence feared a "surrender of the public domain with little prospect of much compensation." John Quincy Adams thought that "the public lands are irrevocably lost, and it were a worthless and a thankless task to intermeddle in the scramble for the spoils." Leverett Saltonstall saw a "danger that the greatest treasure that any nation ever possessed, will be used up, to gain votes, merely to succour the purposes of demagogues."[76] The Massachusetts General Court passed resolves condemning graduation and reaffirming the rights of the old states;[77] and in 1840 the Whigs of the state circulated a pamphlet complaining that Massachusetts was being deprived of its rights.[78] It is small wonder that Webster felt that, in New England, preemption was a subject "greatly misunderstood, as some of our friends will ere long find out."[79] Opening his speech on the graduation bill in 1839, he acknowledged that "on some of the subjects connected with the public lands I have the misfortune to differ with those with whom I generally act." He recalled how James Madison had once remarked to him that "the Northern and Atlantic members of Congress had been quite too inattentive" to the question of the public lands.[80]

There can be little doubt that Webster's remarkable position on the public lands remained closely connected with his presidential aspirations. The *Courier*'s correspondent wrote that no one distrusted the soundness of Webster's motives in supporting the preemption bill, "though doubtless some guessed that it might be with him a secondary object not to give unnecessary offence to the West."[81] Both Webster and Caleb Cushing, his

[74] Boston *Atlas*, Feb. 1, 2, 1838; Boston *Courier*, Feb. 1, 7, 8, 1838; Boston *Columbian Centinel*, Feb. 3, 1838. All three papers were also vigorous opponents of graduation.

[75] *Cong. Globe*, 25 Cong., 2 Sess., 437 (June 7, 1838); 26 Cong., 1 Sess., 405-06 (May 20, 1840), 420 (May 26, 1840)

[76] Hamilton A. Hill, *Memoir of Abbott Lawrence* (Boston, 1884), 19; Charles Francis Adams, ed., *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams* (12 vols., Philadelphia, 1874-1877), X, 16; Leverett Saltonstall to Robert C. Winthrop, Jan. 22, 1839, Winthrop Papers (Massachusetts Historical Society).

[77] Resolves of March 15, 1839, copy in Cushing Papers.

[78] *Massachusetts Defrauded in Relation to the Public Lands*, a pamphlet published by the Whig Republican Association, 1840.

[79] Webster to Winthrop, Feb. 16, 1838, Winthrop Papers.

[80] Speech on graduation, Jan. 14, 1839, *Works*, IV, 523-25.

[81] Boston *Courier*, Feb. 8, 1838.

closest congressional friend at this time, carried on a large western correspondence aimed at sounding out prospects for 1840. Cushing, alone among New England Whigs in the House, pursued the Webster line on the preemption bill; and like Webster, he seemed almost eager to admit that he differed from his colleagues on this matter. Cushing heard from a Missouri correspondent that "Clay's course on Preemptions has, I am quite sure, dashed his prospects here,"[82] while Cushing's own speech was obviously intended for western consumption. John Quincy Adams deplored Cushing's "licentious" views on the public lands and noted that he "takes his cue from Webster, and hazards opinions unpopular now in our State and section, but which he knows will prevail here, and against which he sees that all resistance is vain."[83] Webster sought to have his friend's speech circulated in the West.[84] Hiram Ketchum, his loyal New York henchman, planned to have it republished in Chicago and asked Cushing to prepare an article to appear as an editorial in a Chicago paper under the heading of "*Massachusetts* and the *West*." "In this article," he wrote, "which may be suggested by your speech . . . I wish to see exhibited the ties which bind Mass to the West, the instances in which she has sustained Western policy, and above all let Mr. Webster's measures or votes in support of Western policy be shown."[85]

The various efforts on Webster's behalf came to nothing; his support even in Massachusetts had begun to crumble, and he withdrew from the race in 1839. It is difficult to discern any strong western response to his blandishments, although much later, after the election, a Missouri correspondent assured him that "your support of the Preemption Bill has greatly increased your popularity here, and it has shown the frontier men that, though you reside upon the shores of the Atlantic, you feel an interest and sympathy in the wants & welfare of the hardy & enterprising settlers of the New States."[86]

Despite the frustration of his ambitions, Webster maintained his liberal

[82] *Speech of Mr. Cushing of Massachusetts on the Bill Granting Preemption Rights to Settlers on the Public Lands . . . June 13, 1838* (Washington, 1838); William S. Allen to Cushing, June 9, 1838, Cushing Papers.

[83] Adams, *Memoirs*, X, 18.

[84] Webster to Cushing, July [?], 1838, Cushing Papers. "Can you send 300 copies of your PreEmption Speech to Genl. G. W. Jones of Wisconsin . . . by 3 o'clock this P.M.?"

[85] Hiram Ketchum to Cushing, Sept. 1, 1838, *ibid.* Ketchum hoped to have the article copied in other papers, in East and West, but the present writer has been unable to trace any such article in any newspaper consulted.

[86] Samuel B. Churchill to Webster, Jan. 11, 1841, Webster Papers. Churchill, former editor of the St. Louis *Bulletin* and a state legislator, urged Webster and President-elect Harrison to steal Benton's thunder by pushing through a permanent preemption law.

attitude on land policy; and in view of his record, it is less surprising than has sometimes been suggested[87] that he eventually emerged as a leader of the homestead agitation in Congress. On January 22, 1850, he introduced a homestead resolution, and he made several later attempts to have it debated. Stephen A. Douglas paid tribute to his proposal. Lewis Cass remarked that if he had himself introduced such a resolution, the Whig press would have branded him as a demagogue, whereas Webster's action escaped such censure. Isaac P. Walker of Wisconsin welcomed Webster's support for homestead and commented drily on the "competition" between Douglas, William Seward, Webster, and Sam Houston in support of the measure.[88] Ironically, in view of the reception which awaited his Seventh of March speech a few weeks later, some critics saw Webster's project as a scheme which "would accomplish where abolitionism would not accomplish." It would make "the North-west the great ruling power of the Union."[89] In a speech in 1851 Webster claimed that his object was simply to give land to the landless; so he insisted, as he had for twenty-five years, that only settlement and cultivation gave value to the public lands. He returned to this favorite theme the following year, when he argued that support for homesteads and approval of railroad grants were in no way inconsistent.[90]

To the last, then, Webster was ahead of his time, as well as his section, on the question of the public lands. From 1850 to 1852 pressure in favor of a homestead law was building up in New England as elsewhere, but the New England members of Congress were divided on the issue. Those who opposed homestead were mainly older men and regular Whigs, or they were from northern New England; those who supported it were either men of a new generation and new political affiliations, such as Sumner and Hale, or they were faithful Whig disciples of Webster, such as Ashmun and Julius Rockwell. It was not until 1856 that New England voted deci-

[87] Helene S. Zahler, *Eastern Workingmen and National Land Policy, 1829-1862* (New York, 1941), 139, 141. Zahler expresses surprise that "Webster, darling of Eastern conservatism, could reverse his own position and 'go for' freedom of the public lands to the actual settler." An examination of his earlier record must certainly reduce the element of surprise and cast some doubt upon the alleged reversal of position.

[88] *Cong. Globe*, 31 Cong., 1 Sess., 210, 262-68, 616, 803-04 (Jan. 22, 30, March 28, April 23, 1850).

[89] New York *Journal of Commerce*, quoted in Boston *Courier* (semiweekly ed.), Jan. 31, 1850. Reviewing Webster's life in 1853, a religious periodical praised his support of free lands for settlers as a "far-seeing and magnificent plan" and lamented that Webster had not devoted his full powers to this great object rather than to "the infamous fugitive slave law." *New Englander*, XI (Nov. 1853), 618.

[90] Speech at Buffalo, May 21, 1851, *Works*, II, 542, 541; Webster to Neal, March 12, 1852, *Writings and Speeches*, XVI, 648.

sively in favor of homestead.[91] In a land debate in 1851, Hale urged the older states to give in to the West before it became strong enough simply to take what it wanted.[92] Webster had held much the same view for at least twenty years. His record on public-land policy from 1825 to 1852 does more than anything else to establish his claim to be regarded as a pioneer in the recasting of New England's attitude regarding the West.

Webster's concern for the West is not to be traced to any single source. Though renowned as the spokesman for commerce and industry, he always retained a sentimental attachment to farming, to country life, and to agrarian ideals and values. At one time he even had thoughts of retiring to his lands in Illinois, or at least making an occasional residence there.[93] His son Fletcher did live there for some years. He probably had a natural sympathy (as well as a feeling assumed for political reasons) for the independent farmer of the West, cultivating his own fee-simple inheritance. He also cherished the idea of the growth of a greater New England on the new rich lands of the West. From the 1820s at least, he had a profound belief in the Union both as an emotional symbol and as a functional association of diverse regions and interests. He became a spokesman for that American nationalism which found its most vital and spectacular expression in the development of the West, even though he was never enthusiastic about further expansion by means of annexation or conquest. He opposed the acquisition of more territory because it would endanger national unity, distort the Constitution, and weaken the moral example which the American republic offered to the world. The extent of the nation's territory must be limited if American institutions were to be stable and permanent. Whereas the West of the Great Lakes and the Mississippi Valley represented the fulfillment of the purposes and principles of the Union, Texas and California threatened not only its ideals but also its existence. "What sympathy can there be," Webster asked in 1848, "between the peoples of Mexico and California and the inhabitants of the Valley of the Mississippi and the Eastern States in the choice of a President?"[94] The question clearly implied that such a natural sympathy did unite the eastern states with the Mississippi

[91] These conclusions are based on a study of votes in the House of Representatives on homestead bills between 1850 and 1856. *Cong. Globe*, 31 Cong., 2 Sess., 22 (Dec. 10, 1850), and 278 (Jan. 20, 1851); *ibid.*, 32 Cong., 1 Sess., part 2, p. 1351 (May 12, 1852); *ibid.*, 33 Cong., 1 Sess., part 1, p. 549 (March 6, 1854); *ibid.*, 33 Cong., 2 Sess., 235 (Jan. 10, 1855); *ibid.*, 34 Cong., 1 Sess., 1915 (Aug. 4, 1856).

[92] *Cong. Globe*, 31 Cong., 2 Sess., 213 (Jan. 10, 1851).

[93] Curtis, *Webster*, I, 571-72.

[94] Speech on the objects of the Mexican War, March 23, 1848, *Works*, V, 300. See Webster's speech on the admission of Texas, Dec. 22, 1845, *ibid.*, 56-58, for an excellent brief statement of his objections to further territorial expansion.

Valley. It was perhaps a part of Webster's conservatism that he could see and approve the role of this familiar West as the testing ground on which American institutions and ideals were triumphantly proving themselves but that he could not see a newer and remoter West in the same light. For Webster, as for many eastern conservatives, it was the more familiar West which, in the words of Rush Welter, "ultimately became more than a vehicle for eastern institutions; it embodied the lasting hopes of the American nation."[95]

Webster was above all a realist who saw that the West could not for long be denied; and in any case he was more and more unwilling to deny it, even if he could. Resentment of the West was unworthy; jealousy was futile. Far better to seek a new role as ally, adviser, and partner of the West; far better to exploit the growth of the West than deplore it. Although Webster's sympathies were apparent before he became a contender for the presidency, it is still easy enough to explain his position in 1825, 1830, 1838, 1843, or even in 1850, in terms of political calculation, presidential ambition, or party maneuver. But to doubt the altruism of Webster's interest in the West is not to deny his good sense. Courtship of the West, like everything else, failed to carry him to the presidency; but in serving his own interests as he saw them, he perhaps served New England's interests even better than he knew. His political aspirations forced him to take a wider view and to redefine the relationship between an old, established region like his own and a new, rapidly growing region like the great Northwest. Lesser political figures with limited ambitions and limited horizons found their safest course in defending immediate local interests and resisting the demands of troublesome, thrusting outsiders. For Webster such a course was impossible. Aiming to project himself as a public figure relevant to a democratic age, he saw the advantage of befriending the pioneer and the settler on the virgin lands of the West. Striving for the summit of national power and prestige, he could not confine himself to a negative, isolationist defense of his New England base. Acting on a genuine belief in the basic harmony of interests and sections, he sought, through meeting western demands, to win the allegiance of the West and to demonstrate to his fellow New Englanders where their true long-term interests lay.

The new relationship between New England and the West involved the compromise, if not the surrender, of some traditional interests and attitudes. In recognizing this, Webster distinguished himself from such a man

[95] Rush Welter, "The Frontier West as Image of American Society; Conservative Attitudes before the Civil War," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLVI (March 1960), 613.

as Davis, for many years his senatorial colleague and a worthy representative of orthodox New England Whiggery. Davis had traveled in the West, was widely respected there, and was keenly interested in western development; but he could never discard old attitudes or familiar ideas: the revenue theory of the public lands, the "rights" of the old states, and resentment of western greed and ingratitude. Equally striking is the contrast between Webster and John Quincy Adams. Before and during the War of 1812 Adams expressed enthusiasm about the growth of the West and condemned narrow-minded Yankee politicians who feared and envied it.[96] During his presidency he drew up his blueprint for the planned and controlled development of the West, which would be financed by carefully regulated sales of the public lands. But his scheme foundered on the rocks of southern constitutional scruples, eastern caution and suspicion, and western demands for cheap land and easy, rapid settlement. His enthusiasm turned sour and gave way in the 1830s to constant denunciation of the land-grabbing selfishness of the West.[97] Webster moved in the opposite direction. Beginning as one of the narrow, parochial politicians of 1812, he soon altered course; by 1830, swimming with the tide, he had passed Adams, struggling vigorously against it. Thereafter, while Adams sank ever deeper into despair about the West, Webster struck out ever more boldly on his western course. The difference between the two men was partly the difference between a man who had reached the presidency only to be embittered by it and one who was driven on by unfulfilled presidential ambition. But it was also the difference between a man who had attempted to prescribe for the West and one who came to accept the West's own prescription.

Webster was a pragmatist, but his pragmatism helped to save New England from the isolation to which dogmatism might well have condemned it. He was a conservative, but his conservatism was of the kind which adjusts to new situations rather than turns its back on them. He was a spokesman for sectional economic interests, but one who took the long view of the true nature of those interests. He was a New Englander who saw New England's future neither in rejection of the rapidly expanding West nor in restriction of it, but in cooperation with it. In all this, he was a vital link between the Federalist party and the Republican party, between New En-

[96] John Quincy Adams to John Adams, Aug. 31, 1811, Worthington C. Ford, ed., *Writings of John Quincy Adams* (7 vols., New York, 1913-1917), IV, 208-09; John Quincy Adams to B. Waterhouse, Oct. 24, 1813, *ibid.*, 526-27. Benton quoted this second letter in his argument against Webster and New England during the debate on Foot's resolution in 1830. *Register of Debates in Congress*, 21 Cong., 1 Sess., 97 (Feb. 2, 1830).

[97] Adams, *Memoirs*, VIII, 87-88, 229, 504; IX, 235, 247-48, 259, 441.

gland sectionalism and American nationalism. His career straddled the three stages of proscription, prescription, and propitiation in New England's attitude toward the West. He was the master bridge-builder between one stage and the next.